

Marxism, Stalinism, and the *Juche* Speech of 1955: On the Theoretical De-Stalinization of North Korea

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This essay responds to the argument of Brian Myers that late North Korean leader Kim Il Sung's *Juche* speech of 1955 is not nationalist (or Stalinist) in any meaningful sense of the term. The author examines the literary formalist method of interpretation that leads Myers to that conclusion, considers the programmatic differences of orthodox Marxism and its development as "Marxism-Leninism" under Stalinism, and explains that the North Korean *Juche* speech is not only nationalist, but also grounded in the Stalinist political tradition inaugurated in the Soviet Union in 1924.

Keywords: *Juche*, Nationalism, North Korean Stalinism, Soviet Stalinism, Socialism in One Country

Introduction

Brian Myers, a specialist in North Korean literature and advocate of the view that North Korea is not a Stalinist state, has advanced the argument in his *Acta Koreana* essay, "The Watershed that Wasn't" (2006), that late North Korean leader Kim Il Sung's *Juche* speech of 1955, a landmark document of North Korean Stalinism authored two years after the Korean War, "is not nationalist in any meaningful sense of the term" (Myers 2006:89). That proposition has far-reaching historical and theoretical implications. North Korean studies scholars such as Charles K. Armstrong, Adrian Buzo, Seong-Chang Cheong, Andrei N. Lankov, Chong-Sik Lee, and Balázs Szalontai have explained that North Korea adhered to the tactically unreformed and unreconstructed model of nationalist

Stalinism in the era of the so-called Soviet “de-Stalinization” campaign, which was initiated after the all-powerful dictator Joseph Stalin died in 1953. Particular differences of historiographic approach notwithstanding, their works constitute a formidable corpus of historical knowledge against which Myers’ fundamental argument comes across as problematic. The point here, however, is not to juxtapose the perspectives of the specialists, but to consider the Stalinist historical, political, and programmatic factors behind the *Juche* speech, which contradict the formalist reading that says it is not a nationalist document.

Formalist Method

The claim that the *Juche* speech is not nationalist is an interpretation that results from the methodological perspective of formalism, whose empirical mode of literary analysis essentially takes form for content and appearance for reality. Myers’ first and most decisive use of this method appears in his 1994 book *Han Sorya and North Korean Literature*, a biography of the state-sanctioned writer who was an architect of the Kim Il Sung personality cult. (The second major use is in his 2002 polemic against American postmodern novels, *A Reader’s Manifesto*, which sees the literature in purely abstract structural terms without a sociohistorical component.) Notwithstanding that *Han Sorya and North Korean Literature* is a useful work that emerged as the first Western study of its kind a decade ago, it advanced the exaggerated and erroneous thesis that the Soviet Stalinist doctrine of *socialist realism* failed in North Korea. South Korean scholar Hyun-Soo Lim (1989) has already shown that North Korean literary control policy was thoroughly influenced and pervaded by Zhdanovism (Stalinist cultural nationalism in the arts) and Soviet *socialist realism* from 1946 to 1950. Tatiana Gabroussenko (2004) has also written an instructive, but hitherto unpublished, doctoral dissertation about the rapid and successful implementation of Stalinist *socialist realism* in North Korean literary politics and literature in the period of 1945 to 1960. One can thus say that although Soviet *socialist realist* narrative design was not, nor could it be, *simply replicated* in the North Korean sociocultural environment, the North Korean regime remained faithful to Soviet “cultural czar” Andrei Zhdanov’s essential, paradigmatic demand at the 1934 First Soviet Writers’ Congress for a heroic *socialist realist* fiction infused with didacticism, ethnocentrism, populism, and glorification of party control of literature (Zhdanov 1950). Moreover, North

Korean cultural authorities retained the three cardinal political tenets of *socialist realism*—*partiinost* (party spirit), *narodnost* (national character), and *ideinost* (ideological expression)—fostering a state-controlled national literature that was and remains subordinated to the changing tactical line and policies that flow from Stalin's nationalist economic-political program of *socialism in one country*, which was implemented in postcolonial North Korea.

The formalist claim that socialist realism failed in North Korea does not accord with what the doctrine and style meant in practice in that country or the other *deformed workers' states* that upheld the Stalinist program of *socialism in one country* (e.g., China, Cuba, Vietnam, and the Eastern Bloc countries). Myers lays out a scenario where North Korean literature is incompatible with Russian *socialist realism* because one official author does not reproduce the narrative style of the Soviet *socialist realist* classics. But this is not an indication that *socialist realism* failed in North Korea. There is bound to be narratological difference in all literature for cultural, ethnographical, historical, and sociological reasons. So-called national literatures can belong to the same *literary tradition*, in any case. One cannot declare, for example, that Romanticism failed in the United States because one writer, say, Henry David Thoreau, departed in some particular respect from the style of the British Romantics—Byron, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth. Not only would such a claim be seen by the experts in American and British Romanticism as a rhetorical fallacy, it would be generally dismissed as an oversimplification and hasty generalization.

Suffice it to say that the social-political content of North Korean *socialist realism* incarnates the *populist-Bonapartist* spirit of the Stalinist 1930s and 1940s. Besides, the Pyongyang regime rejected the Soviet bureaucratic-reformist “de-Stalinization” campaign initiated in the 1950s. Stalinism is the political and cultural heritage North Korea adopted and assimilated after the Soviet Red Army liberation of northern Korea on 15 August 1945, following the agreements at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences. Even the cultural xenophobia and racist caricatures that Myers formalistically points out in Han Sorya's fiction, as being yet another departure from Soviet *socialist realism*, are not unique or exclusive to North Korean narrative texts. They have an ideological precedent in the anti-foreignism, Great Russian chauvinism, “Soviet patriotism,” and anti-Semitism—a subtext of the Moscow Trials (1936–1938) that culminated in the state campaign against so-called “rootless cosmopolitans” (1949–1953)—during the dark age of Zhdanovism in 1946 to 1953.

(Azadovskii and Egorov 2002; Rogovin 1998:154–63; Rubenstein and Naumov 2001; Vickery 1963). Emerging writers in North Korea fed off this political-cultural influence and, ostensibly, the nationalist petty-bourgeois (i.e., middle-class) social values that permeated Soviet Stalinist *socialist realist* literature (Dunham 1990; Daniels 1993:93). The Soviet cultural apparatus had, after all, made successful inroads into the Red Army-occupied North in 1945; Korean translations of Soviet literary, historical, and technical works were available in overwhelming abundance; and the Pyongyang leadership was pursuing a policy of “absorbing the advanced Soviet culture [in order] to develop our national culture,” as Minister of Culture and Propaganda Pae Chong Son said in 1949 (Department of State Bulletin 1951:795).

With the arguments that *socialist realism* failed in North Korea and that the *Juche* speech of 1955 is not a nationalist document, this inexorably renders a theoretical “de-Stalinization” of the North Korean regime. Myers claims that he has read Kim Il Sung’s speech in “the context of *its own time*” (italics in the original), but later says that his proposition is based on “an analysis of *the text itself*,” on “a close reading of the text” (Myers 2006:89, 92; emphasis added). Something here is amiss. Any historical document taken in itself in textological analysis is, more often than not, read outside of history and falls in line with the subjectively determined interpretation of the individual who reads that text. This is a classical methodological problem of literary formalism. If North Korea is not a Stalinist state and if the *Juche* speech is not an assertion of political nationalism, what else can they be? Brian Myers says the speech represents a “‘creative’ application of Marxism-Leninism to national conditions” (Myers 2006:89).

Socialism in One Country

The phrase “Marxism-Leninism” made its first appearance in the summer of 1924 in documents produced by the Stalin-dominated Comintern (Van Ree 2002:256). Joseph Stalin himself made one of his first official uses of the term in a 1928 speech that can be found in his *Works* (Stalin 1954b: 315), and the designation was popularized soon thereafter under his absolute dictatorship in the Soviet Union. Politically, this compound noun was and is used in the Stalinist movement as a codeword for a host of nationalist policies constituted in the autarkic economic program of *socialism in one country*, which Stalin and

Nikolai Bukharin (murdered in 1938 during Stalin's Great Terror) advanced after Vladimir Lenin's fatal stroke in January 1924. Representing a fundamental break with the orthodox Marxist perspective of internationalism and co-leader of the Russian Revolution Leon Trotsky's theory of *permanent revolution* (i.e., world socialist revolution)—which Lenin adopted in April 1917 as the political program of the October Russian Revolution—*socialism in one country* was based on the utopian conception that the classless socialist society could be built upon the national reserves of a geographically confined nation-state. The theory of *socialism in one country* made a fetish of the uneven aspect of the classical Marxist economic law of *unequal and combined development*, and, consequently, held the idea that a self-sufficient national-socialist state could develop in isolation from the world economy and the pressures of the capitalist profit system. Writing in *The Third International After Lenin* in 1928, Trotsky, now the leader of the Marxist Left Opposition against Stalinism, explained:

Linking up countries and continents that stand on different levels of development into a system of mutual dependence and antagonism, leveling out the various stages of their development and at the same time immediately enhancing the differences between them, and ruthlessly counterposing one country to another, world economy has become a mighty reality which holds sway over the economic life of individual countries and continents. This basic fact alone invests the idea of a world communist party with a supreme reality. Bringing world economy as a whole to the highest phase of development generally attainable on the basis of private property, imperialism [...] 'aggravates to an extreme tension the contradiction between the growth of the productive forces of world economy and the national-state barriers.'

Without grasping the meaning of this proposition, which was vividly revealed to mankind for the first time during the last imperialist war [i.e., the First World War], we cannot take a single step towards the solution of the major problems of world politics and revolutionary struggle.

[...]

Marx and Engels, even prior to the imperialist epoch, had arrived at the conclusion that on the one hand, unevenness, i.e., sporadic historical development, stretches the proletarian revolution through an entire epoch in the course of which nations will enter the revolutionary flood one after another; while, on the other hand, the organic interdependence of the

several countries, developing toward an international division of labor, excludes the possibility of building socialism in one country. This means that the Marxian doctrine, which posits that the socialist revolution can begin only on a national basis, while the building of socialism in one country is impossible, has been rendered *doubly and trebly true*, all the more so now, in the modern epoch when imperialism has developed, deepened, and sharpened both, of these antagonistic tendencies. On this point, Lenin merely developed and concretized Marx's own formulation and Marx's own answer to this question. (Trotsky 2003: italics in the original)

That is to say, the orthodox Marxist conception of socialism/communism, a globally integrated classless society, needs internationalism and can issue only on the basis of a level of world economic development higher than the most advanced capitalism. Socialism, moreover, following a national transitional period of working-class rule (i.e., the *dictatorship of the proletariat*), requires democratic control of the means of production and international planning to satisfy human needs. As Trotsky says in his classic *The Revolution Betrayed*, written in 1936 and published in English in 1937:

The material premise of communism should be so high a development of the productive forces that productive labor, having ceased to be a burden, will not require any goad, and the distribution of life's goods, existing in continual abundance, will not demand—as it does not now in any well-off family or “decent” boardinghouse—any control except that of education, habit and social opinion. Speaking frankly, I think it would be pretty dull-witted to consider such a really modest perspective “utopian.”

(Trotsky 1996)

By pursuing a policy of self-contained socialist development in an isolated backward country, the Stalinist bureaucracy was laying the objective preconditions for the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union. Since the nation-state form had, according to orthodox Marxist analysis, outlived its historical usefulness with the onset of the twentieth century—as confirmed by the global economic breakdown that led to the First World War—the task of constructing *socialism in one country* could only mean that, despite a limited period of successes, the autarkic national-socialist state would eventually put a

break on economic development and be unable to compete with the advanced capitalist countries. As Trotsky and his supporters had foreseen, that is what finally happened when the Soviet Union was juridically liquidated in 1991, a process overseen by its until-then-ruling Communist Party. The program of the international revolution or the program of *socialism in one country*? That was the fundamental question Trotsky posed in *The Third International After Lenin*. Despite the intractable struggle of the Marxist Left Opposition, Stalin and his followers defeated them through the period of 1925 to 1929 and, still fearing their political influence, perpetrated the Great Terror of 1937, a mass bloodletting which the late Russian historian and sociologist Vadim Z. Rogovin has suggested was, in actuality, an antisocialist genocide. (Robert C. Tucker, a non-Marxist historian, has, if somewhat abstractly, described the Terror as the Russian version of the Nazi holocaust.) The rightwing nature of national-Stalinism, while differing from the Hitlerite methods of ethnic genocide, is clear when one sees that Stalin and his executioners in the Politburo and NKVD targeted and murdered more Soviet and foreign Marxists “than all the world’s fascist dictators together” (Daniels 1993:95). With the physical extermination of the socialist working class and the Old Bolshevik generation of 1917 under the trumped-up charge of “Trotskyism,” orthodox Marxism and socialist internationalism were erased from Soviet political life.

Stalinism in North Korea

The emergence of Stalinism in North Korea is inextricably bound up with the historical experience of the Soviet Union, particularly, with the isolation of the workers’ state and the bureaucratization of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Communist International (Comintern or Third International) after thousands of working-class cadre perished in the Russian Civil War (1918–1921), men and women who were replaced by alien class elements drawn in from the lower urban middle class. Struggling against this new layer of middle-class bureaucrats in the workers’ party, the program advanced by the Marxist Left Opposition under Trotsky’s leadership defended the fundamental class interests of the Russian proletariat, who, in the aftermath of the Civil War, was a politically exhausted social force. The Soviet working class was now susceptible to the promise of a national solution as offered in Stalin’s theory of *socialism in one country* (North 1995, 1998, 2001; Van Auken

2005). Some two decades later, when the Soviet Red Army liberated northern Korea in 1945—after the Korean Peninsula had experienced thirty-five years of Japanese imperialist colonial rule—the Soviet Union was thoroughly unrecognizable from the standpoint of classical Marxism and the workers’ state established in 1917. World capitalism proved stronger than Lenin had foreseen, and it successfully isolated the Russian Revolution in conditions of economic and cultural backwardness. Material poverty, isolation, civil war, foreign intervention, and the masses unfamiliarity with self-government laid the groundwork for bureaucracy and dictatorship. By the 1940s, the Soviet regime had degenerated into a totalitarian monstrosity, a Bonapartist police state ruled by the all-powerful Stalin, a despot wielding unlimited power and rendered in the official propaganda as the beloved, sagacious, and wise “father” and “friend” of the Soviet people, the leader of their great “socialist motherland,” and the head of the “monolithic party” (i.e., an ultra-centralist dictatorial political party). The emergence of the Kim Il Sung personality cult in North Korea would employ the same patricentric discourse and comparable iconography, even if expressed in indigenous symbolic form.

The 1940s was also the height of the *Zhdanovschina* (Zhdanovism, or, Stalinist cultural nationalism), named after the aforesaid Andrei Zhdanov, who was also a Politburo member and secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU. According to one North Korean source, Kim Il Sung (1912–1994)—a former Korean member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), guerilla commander in the CCP’s anti-Japanese Manchurian campaigns of 1931–1941, and now a captain in the Soviet 88th Brigade—was conferring with Zhdanov one day before Korean liberation from Japan. The subject of their discussion was the prospect of state-building in Korea (Korean News 1998). There is no doubt that Kim was a faithful and trusted disciple of Stalinism. He received his political training in the CCP and the Soviet Army and, furthermore, had a deep-seated admiration for Stalin. Although this relatively young partisan was eventually installed by the Soviet occupation authorities as the strongman of the North Korean government, he was not the initial candidate for that position. Soviet military personnel initially expressed interest in the famous rightwing nationalist leader Cho Man-Sik, also known as the “Korean Gandhi” (Lankov 2002:14). Like the United States military in the South, the Soviets were interested in building a pliant client state on the Korean Peninsula that would be amenable to and obediently serve their national interests. Cho, however, was uncompromising in his demands for autonomy from the Soviet Union. He

would eventually be arrested by the Soviet authorities, shot, and buried in an unmarked grave (Lankov 2002:23–4).

North Korea was founded as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on 9 September 1948, three weeks after the U.S.-endorsed declaration of the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the South on 15 August. Stalin himself edited and approved the first North Korean Constitution of 1948 (Lankov 2002:42–7). The division of the Korean Peninsula, implemented in 1945 as the outcome of political deals between Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill, was fundamentally a unilateral decision by the United States government, whose demands the conservative Soviet government simply acceded to. The Kremlin bureaucracy, coming out of the Second World War, wanted to avoid a military confrontation with American imperialism at all costs. Despite plans for peninsula-wide elections overseen by the United Nations, irreconcilable policy differences between the United States and Soviet Union made the division of Korea permanent. Soviet occupation forces were withdrawn from North Korea in December 1948. U.S. combat troops also left the South, but a contingent of military advisers remained. Notably, Stalin's conception of the "monolithic party" was not entirely characteristic of the DPRK when it was proclaimed three years after the Soviet liberation. Rather, North Korea was ruled by a leftwing "united front" coalition government under the faction-riven Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), a creation of the Soviet military in 1946. The WPK was also a "mass party" and the vast majority of its membership were "poor peasant" in class composition (Armstrong 2004:109–10, 242). North Korea was functioning, nonetheless, on the Stalinist program of *socialism in one country* and the Stalinist-Menshevik theory of stages, the mid-1940s development of which held that a national-socialist state would be achieved by first passing through a "people's democracy." This political conception, foreign to all the Marxist literature, made socialism possible without the *dictatorship of the proletariat*, that is, without a government of the self-ruling working class. Stalin reconceived the formula in 1948, saying that the "people's democracy" is a "form of the dictatorship of the proletariat" (Pablo 2005). Kim Il Sung adhered to these formulations.

With the dismantlement of the Japanese fascist-colonial state apparatus in North Korea, a series of agricultural and labor reforms, gender equality laws, anti-illiteracy campaigns, and cultural assimilation programs were implemented with the auspices of Soviet advisers, who were operating behind native government staffs and civil servants from 1945 to 1950. In contrast to the

intensifying social crisis in the South under the pro-American rightwing military-police dictatorship of Syngman Rhee, the radical changes in North Korean social life were carried out, according to Charles Armstrong, with the popular support of the poor peasantry and, in comparison to land reform in the Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam, with a relative lack of bloodshed and violence (Armstrong 2004:77, 80–1, 149, 242), despite North Korea being a budding authoritarian Stalinist state. But tensions between the mutually opposed regimes in the North and South were reaching a boiling point.

The Korean War

Under conditions of forced national division of which the United States government played a decisive role, Stalinist North Korea and autocratic South Korea sought to unite the Korean Peninsula by military force. Border fighting and small-scale incursions were already occurring in 1946, and popular uprisings were also sparked in South Korea. The ultrarightist Syngman Rhee was now particularly vocal about a campaign to “march North” and hoped to obtain U.S. military assistance in his invasion plans. Kim Il Sung was not yet in a position to respond to these provocations. The Korean People’s Army (KPA) was fighting with Mao Zedong’s CCP guerrilla armies in the Chinese Civil War until the victory of the 1949 Chinese Revolution. On 25 June 1950, Kim, with permission from Stalin and Mao, launched an all-out offensive against South Korea.

Experienced KPA troops returning from China and armed with Soviet tanks, aircraft, and artillery swept through Southern defenses. Seoul was taken in three days. But the tide turned when the United States Armed Forces, under a United Nations flag, intervened in the civil war between the two Korean regimes. Northern forces were pushed back above the 38th parallel. Thereafter, General Douglas MacArthur led an invasion into the North in what was an almost unlimited colonial-style war of conquest. When the U.S. military approached the Chinese border, Mao dispatched “volunteer” units of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army that November to save the Pyongyang regime. The Truman administration, in response, came close to authorizing the use of nuclear weapons against China and North Korea. General MacArthur even demanded that thirty to fifty atomic bombs be dropped on the Manchurian-Korean border to spread “a belt of radioactive cobalt” from the East Sea/Sea of Japan to the

Yellow Sea. This proposal was dropped in fear of Soviet nuclear retaliation.

The Korean War reached a stalemate and ended with the signing of the Joint Armistice Agreement on 27 July 1953. All of North Korea was in ruins and at least two million Korean civilians were dead after three years of fighting. This staggering death toll is equivalent to that of *twelve years* of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, a conflict which involved more than 6.1 million tons of American bombs. Some 678,000 tons of bombs were dropped in the Korean War (Kohn and Harahan 1988:129n152). On North Korea proper, the U.S. Air Force averaged eighteen bombs per square kilometer of the country, or, more specifically, 97,000 tons of bombs and 7.8 million gallons of a new weapon, napalm (Park 2001). A jellied gasoline, napalm cannot be extinguished with water, burns at 900–1,300 degrees Celsius, and causes asphyxiation from carbon monoxide poisoning. U.S. Air Force General Curtis LeMay, whose proposal to drop incendiaries on North Korean towns was initially rejected by the Pentagon, later recalled:

[W]e went over there and fought the war and burned down every town in North Korea anyway, some way or another, and some in South Korea, too. We even burned down Pusan—an accident, but we burned it down anyway. The Marines started a battle down there with no enemy in sight. Over a period of three years or so, we killed off—what—twenty percent of the population of Korea as direct casualties of war, or from starvation and exposure. (Kohn and Harahan 1988:88)

The North Korean leaders and people have not yet overcome the deep sociopsychological trauma and hardened, militant nationalism that resulted from this experience, which apparently reinforced all the more the nationalist and patriotic sentiments that were already formed and encrusted under the tragedy and terror of Imperial Japanese fascist barbarism in the 1930s and 1940s.

The North Korean plan for a swift military takeover of South Korea was, in any case, catastrophically miscalculated, and it compromised Kim Il Sung's position in the WPK to a certain extent. But during the wartime years, Soviet influence had diminished considerably in North Korea and an inner party struggle was raging. Taking advantage of the confusion created by the war, Kim, who was pursuing his own national-Stalinist tactical line within the strategic orientation of *socialism in one country*, began to oust his political rivals, including the Soviet Korean Ho Ka-I (Alexei Ivanovich Hegai), the most

prominent and influential Russian Korean in North Korea. Rivals for party leadership, their central dispute concerned the class character of the WPK. Kim favored the (Maoist) conception of a mass peasant party and Ho favored a smaller, less heterogeneous organization of less than 60,000 members consisting in the main of industrial workers. The WPK had 700,000 members in 1948; however, 52 percent were classified as “poor peasant” and 21 percent as “workers” (Armstrong 2004:110). Ho was also critical of the growing personality cult around Kim. Ho Ka-I was purged in 1951 and reportedly committed suicide in 1953. A political assassination cannot be ruled out (Lankov 2002:150–2). Events of this sort worked towards Kim’s increasing domination of the WPK and its movement in the direction of a truly “monolithic party.”

***Juche* Speech of 1955**

Kim Il Sung’s 28 December 1955 speech to WPK propagandists and agitators officially translated as “On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing *Juche* in Ideological Work” (Sasang saeop-eseo kyojochuui-wa hyeongsikchuui-reol toechi hago juche-reol hwangnip-hal te taehayeo) was made against the recent political experiences and human catastrophes of the Korean War and the inner party struggles that were exacerbated in the WPK. The word *Juche* literally means “subject.” But it has also been defined in North Korean sources as “independent stand” (Baik 1969:132), “independent line” (Baik 1970a:190), the “spirit of self-reliance” (Baik 1970a:412), and the “principle of self-reliance” (Baik 1970b:132). These definitions are faithful summaries of Stalin’s national autarkic economic program, which the Soviet tyrant described at the Fourteenth Congress of the CPSU in 1925 as follows: “There is another general line, which takes as its starting point that we must exert all efforts to make our country *an economically self-reliant, independent country based on the home market*” (Stalin 1954a: 306; emphasis added). Myers has noted that North Korean sources in English begin to render “*Juche*” in transliterated, as opposed to translated form, from around 1965 onwards (Myers 2006:95, 110). The significance of the *Juche* speech is seen both in what it says about North Korean domestic and foreign policy—prioritizing autarkic national-socialist interests and not the post-Stalin “Soviet [tactical-reformist] way” (Kim 1972a:28)—and in the events that immediately followed it: namely, the

denunciations against Kim by leaders of the August opposition (1956), the North Korean Great Purge (1956–1960), and the rapid industrialization and forced collectivization campaign called the Cheollima Movement (1956–1961).

When the *Juche* speech was made, Stalin was dead two years and bureaucratic self-reform from above—that is, without the full democratic participation of the Soviet people—was gradually making its way through the Soviet Union. This so-called “de-Stalinization” campaign was finally confirmed in Nikita Khrushchev’s “secret speech” at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in February 1956, during which Stalin’s personality cult was officially repudiated. Responding to the Soviet “thaw” and to the political developments that culminated in the speech—Kim had already recognized the implications and dangers of these developments in mid-1953 (Szalontai 2005:57–8)—and to the threatening pro-Soviet reformist platform in his party and government, he advanced the tactically unreformed Stalinist program of *socialism in one country* in North Korea on North Korean terms. Not insignificantly, the *Juche* speech was preceded by the return of North Korean writers who attended the Second Soviet Writers’ Congress in December 1954 and had come, or were coming, under the influence of the corresponding “thaw” in Soviet *socialist realist* literary policy. While the decisiveness of this event may be in debate (Myers 1994:89), it would have had certain exploitable political implications, nevertheless. Kim’s nationalist *Juche* campaign thus materialized in the form of an attack on the “literary front” aimed at the Soviet Korean faction in the WPK, that is, he used national cultural policy as a pretext against internal allies and informants of the post-Stalin Soviet government. The individuals concerned were denounced for Russifying North Korean cultural life and for now holding reactionary political views (Szalontai 2005:78–81). Russian literature was also slandered when Kim condemned the Romantic and Futurist poets Alexander Pushkin and Vladimir Mayakovksy as “foreigners” who were useless for instilling feelings of “national pride” (*minjokjeok jabusim*) in elementary school children. Despite the official translation, the Korean words for this “national pride” also mean *ethnic pride and racial pride*, and the phrase would easily have been understood as such by the WPK audience. Moreover, for *Juche* to be presented by Kim in 1955 as the ideological program of the “Korean revolution” itself and not “any other country’s revolution” is an even more striking confirmation that his ethnic nationalism was adhering to the ultranationalist requirements of Stalin’s 1924 policy of *socialism in one country* (Kim 1972a:19,

23; Kim 1960:326, 330). That is to say, Kim was being a consistent and faithful Stalinist. Like his deceased hero, Kim Il Sung consolidated his totalitarian dictatorship in the party and government after the Korean War (Stalin had done so after the Russian Civil War) and put forward the equivalent of Stalin's brutal ultraleftist policies in the First Five-Year Plan (1928–1932), as well as those in Mao's First Five-Year Plan (1953–1957), which consisted of a series of now termed "little leaps," and the disastrous Great Leap Forward (1958–1962). The tactically reformist Khrushchev regime denounced the North Korean Five-Year Plan (1956–1961) as a "useless fantasy" and regarded the Maoist Great Leap Forward and People's Communes as dangerous political experiments (Hun 1966:134, 155).

Mao, like Kim, opposed the changes in Soviet Stalinist tactical orientation as constituted in the "de-Stalinization" campaign, and the Chinese influence in North Korea is not surprising. Kim had a ten-year history as a CCP member and partisan guerrilla beginning in 1931, though having actually associated with the party since 1926, and he was fluent in Chinese. After the Korean War, North Korea and China also established the joint Economic and Cultural Agreement of November 1953, and the Chinese army occupied the country until 1958. That is the year the Maoist government officially made autarkic "self-reliance" its principal economic policy orientation (Mao 2004). This period coincided with the middle of the North Korean Five-Year Plan (1956–1961), and Kim began to use his slogan of "self-reliance" with increasing emphasis (Hun 1966:134). China, no doubt, had a direct influence on North Korea and, consequently, a distinctly Chinese Stalinist style found its way into North Korean political culture. One should add that from 1958 to 1959, the "debate" on subjectivity was underway in China, and the Maoists began vigorously promoting the "theory of subjective activity" in the country (Altaisky and Georgiev 1971:67). The contemporaneous emphasis on voluntarism in Kim Il Sung's speeches during the Chinese occupation—and, subsequently, in the crude populist anthropocentric slogan "man is the master of everything and decides everything" that would become the core principle of the *Juche* doctrine—is an ostensible reflection of developments in Maoist ideology. The role of man as "the decisive factor" (Mao's words) has actually been a mainstay of Maoism since the 1930s, that is, when Kim was a member of the Manchurian section of the CCP. Maoism, however, is not openly acknowledged in North Korea, as Soviet Stalinism was in the preceding period.

When the unfolding Sino-Soviet split was decisively worsened after the

Twenty-Second Congress of the CPSU in October and November 1961, North Korea was already in the process of distancing itself from the Soviet Union and China, officially claiming neutrality in the diplomatic conflict, but leaning closer to the Mao Zedong regime, nevertheless. Within a decade, the revised North Korean Constitution of 1972 declared formal political independence from both countries and made *Juche* the official state ideology. But state-controlled literature published in North Korea would continue making obligatory references to so-called “Marxism-Leninism” for the next two decades. The Soviet Union, after all, was the country’s greatest economic benefactor. After the collapse of the USSR, *Juche* ideology, systemized by WPK ideologues such as the Soviet-educated theoreticians Hwang Chang-yop and Yang Hyong-so since the 1960s (Petrov 2003; Suh 1996:18), took center stage. Politically, *Juche* is an unremarkable variation of the national-Stalinist program of *socialism in one country* defined in Kim’s slogans “independence in politics” (*jaju*; first use 1957), “self-sustenance in the economy” (*jarip*; first use 1956), and “self-defense in national defense” (*jawi*; first use 1962), which formally appeared in a 1965 speech he delivered at the Ali Archam Academy of Social Sciences in Indonesia (Kim 1968:38; Waldenström 2005:12). The crude reasoning behind this policy is that economic autarky is a precondition for political autonomy. That Stalinist formulation is theoretically and practically false and is resulting in the restoration of capitalism in North Korea today—confirming Trotsky’s analysis of Stalinism in *The Revolution Betrayed*—as evidenced by the implementation of capitalist market methods through gradual economic “reforms,” such as the July 2002 price and wage reforms (Lee and Yoon 2004:40; Seliger 2005:35). Philosophically, the *Juche* ideology is an eclectic idealist doctrine of *national subjectivism* that has more in common with a state religion and the platitudes of Maoism. Kim Il Sung’s son-successor Kim Jong Il emerged as the undisputed interpreter and defender of *Juche*-Stalinism in the 1980s.

Nationalism and Internationalism

Brian Myers observes that *Juche* was not advanced in 1955 as an attempt to create an original or new ideological system (Myers 2006:103–4). But that is not especially revelatory. In an interview with the Japanese newspaper *Mainichi Shimbun* on 17 September 1972, Kim Il Sung acknowledged the unoriginality of

the *Juche* program, saying “we are not the author of this idea,” adding that he merely put “special emphasis” on the tactically unreformed policies of *socialism in one country* in the post-Stalin era (Kim 1972b: 1). Previously, in the 1965 Ali Archam Academy lecture, he said:

The year 1955 marked a turning-point in our Party’s consistent struggle against dogmatism [i.e., subordination to Soviet foreign policy]. In fact, our struggle against modern revisionism [i.e., the Soviet “de-Stalinization” campaign] that had emerged within the socialist camp [i.e., the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries] began at that time. Our struggle against dogmatism was thus linked with the struggle against modern revisionism. (Kim 1968:40-1)

The *Juche* speech, to be sure, does not signal the advent of a *new* ideology. Rather, in the epoch of Soviet tactical “de-Stalinization,” Kim’s speech on *Juche* signaled a regression to the *old* ideology and tactics of 1930s nationalist Stalinism to secure the interests and privileges of the North Korean state bureaucracy. Therefore, it is incorrect to argue that there is nothing nationalist about the *Juche* ideology. The North Korean doctrine and the speech that preceded its systematic formulation are idiosyncratically nationalist and Stalinist. By the conclusion of “The Watershed that Wasn’t,” Myers poses the question as to why Kim Il Sung said little about the *Juche* ideology until a decade after its 1955 inauguration before WPK propagandists and agitators. “There can be no logical explanation,” he remarks (Myers 2006:109). This is misleading. Professor Dae-Sook Suh, a long-established authority on North Korean political history, answers the question in the 1988 biography *Kim Il Sung*:

For the next eight years, from December 1955 to February 1963, Kim did not speak often about the idea of *chuch’e*. When he shuttled back and forth from Moscow to Beijing [to solicit funds, technical assistance, and material aid] like a man without *chuch’e*, trying to ascertain his own place in the intensifying Sino-Soviet dispute, he was silent about the subject and anything concerning the self-reliance of his party or government. [. . .]. It was not until he clearly understood the implications of the Sino-Soviet dispute for North Korea and had chosen sides that he began to elaborate on the subject of *chuch’e*. More important, it was after

the Soviet Union had stopped its economic and military assistance to the North [as punishment for supporting China] that Kim began to speak about self-sustenance and self-defense. [...] During the latter half of the 1960s, his woes increased with the coming of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The Chinese disowned him and branded him a revisionist, and it was through this Chinese push that he was finally able to justify the claim that he was self-reliant, the founder and subscriber of the great idea of *chuch'e*. (Suh 1988:307–8)

Kim Il Sung, in other words, said little about *Juche* and his contempt for Khrushchev's "modern revisionism" for almost a decade because, in the wake of the economic and humanitarian catastrophes of the Korean War, he could not afford to alienate North Korea as a beneficiary of Soviet and Chinese postwar assistance. Nevertheless, the objectively changed world political situation, compounded all the more by declining foreign aid inflows, and the worsening of the Sino-Soviet split in 1960 to 1963 eventually necessitated the elaboration of *Juche* as a nationalist and Stalinist "independent" line. Myers, however, proceeds to claim that American and South Korean scholars such as Chang-Boh Chee, Dong Jun Lee (a Pyongyang-based *Pravda* writer who fled to the South in 1959), Glenn D. Paige, and Key P. Yang were effectively co-creators of the *Juche* ideology because they in particular transliterated and defined the Korean word as "national individuality" and "independence" in the 1963 book *North Korea Today*, when North Korean sources at the time had not done so (Scalapino 1963; Myers 2006:109–10). An examination of the relevant essays confirms how relatively discerning these definitions were in the early 1960s. Conversely, the 1966 publication titled *Study of North Korea* was somehow unable to fully identify the political significance of Kim's 1955 speech, with his reference to *Juche*, and thus made no direct mention of it. Myers, nevertheless, has one consider that North Korean authorities may have been so impressed by *North Korea Today*, especially to the focus it gave to *Juche*, that they, in turn, transliterated the term and transformed it into a full-blown ideology in 1965. That hypothesis, however, appears untenable. Professor Kwang-Shick Kang has already explained that the formal term *Juche Sasang* (*Juche* ideology or subject ideology) was first used in 1962 in the aggravated circumstances of the Sino-Soviet split (Kang 2001:363). Conceptualization of *Juche* as an ideology proper preceded publication of *North Korea Today*, and that is more likely what motivated transliteration instead of translation.

Compounding the formalistic problems in the arguments that the *Juche* speech is not nationalist and that its real creators are Western or Western-based scholars, “The Watershed that Wasn’t” does not draw a programmatic distinction between Marxism and Stalinism. Moreover, Brian Myers characterizes *Juche* as a “farrago of Marxist and humanist banalities” and he seems to generally accept the official post-1924 Soviet Stalinist interpretation of classical Marxism (Myers 2006:91). This underscores his view that the *Juche* speech is not nationalist and that “foreigners” are responsible for that opinion. He asserts further:

This assumption [about nationalism in the “*Juche* Speech”] is incorrect. In the 1920s Lenin had called on his party to preserve what was valuable in pre-revolutionary cultural traditions, and Stalin’s ideologues had emphasized the need for popular spirit (*narodnost’*) when applying Marxism-Leninism to a given cultural sphere. Parties were expected to exploit national traditions to make propaganda effective. (Myers 2006:102)

This passage makes the argument of Leninist (orthodox Marxist) adaptationism and presumes an identification of Bolshevik internationalism and Stalinist nationalism. That, however, is the old political mythos first introduced by Stalin in the infamous second edition of his “The Foundations of Leninism” and in articles like “Trotskyism or Leninism?” and “The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists” (all written in 1924), in which the dictator mendaciously identified his nationalist conceptions à la *socialism in one country* as “Leninist theory” or “Lenin’s theory.” The political discrepancies between Leninism and Stalinism have already been discussed by authoritative Soviet studies scholars such as Moshe Lewin, a senior historian of the Soviet Union, who has documented Lenin’s struggle against Stalin; Robert C. Tucker, another senior Sovietologist, who has explained that Stalin feigned orthodoxy and transmuted Lenin’s internationalist Bolshevism into a chauvinistic Russian National Bolshevism; Neil Harding, who has described Leninism, contra Stalin’s nationalist corruptions, as authentic Marxism; and David Brandenberger, who has characterized the ethnocentric nationalism, populism, and chauvinism of Stalinist *kulturpolitik* as an ideological about-face from Bolshevik internationalism. Notably, when Stalin’s nationalist-socialist political program and mythos were inaugurated in the 1920s, they were subjected to all-round

comprehensive attack by Leon Trotsky, co-leader of the Russian Revolution and Lenin's second-in-command. One of Trotsky's influential, subsequent appraisals of the Stalinist bureaucratic mythology appears in the 1937 essay "Stalinism and Bolshevism" and is most elaborately rendered in his enduring political masterwork, *The Revolution Betrayed*, published in translation in the same year. Stalinism may thus be seen not so much as the product of Marxism, but as the conservative political reaction against it, the fulfillment of Stalin's conservative nationalist aims requiring moreover the murder of all the leaders of the October Revolution in his Great Terror. There is, one should note, an opposing body of academic opinion, represented by figures such as Robert Conquest, Leszek Kolakowski, Martin Malia, Daniel Pipes, Robert Service, Erik Van Ree, and others, that emphasizes political and ideological continuity between Lenin's orthodox Marxism and Stalinism. The author contends that this view, which repeats the old Soviet Stalinist party line, is based on a misreading or misrepresentation of the historical record.

Another matter is that nowhere in the forty-five volumes of Lenin's *Collected Works* will one find any reference to emphasizing *narodnost* or exploiting "national traditions" for the sake of propaganda. Even a close reading of Lenin's 1914 article "On the National Pride of the Great Russians" reveals that neither is this particular document an adaptationist concession to Great Russian chauvinism, but an attempt to exert an antiwar, revolutionary influence on the deep-going nationalist sentiments of the laboring Russian masses, in order to mobilize them against the First World War (Lenin 2005; North 2001). The political record confirms that Lenin was an intransigent, lifelong opponent of nationalism and chauvinism, and he made it a matter of policy that the Bolshevik Party "combat all nationalism of every kind and, above all, Great-Russian nationalism" (Lenin 2000). There is no shortage of quotes in this regard. As the socialist leader emphasized in his "Critical Remarks on the National Question," which was written a year earlier in 1913, "Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even of the 'most just,' 'purest,' most refined and civilized brand. In place of nationalism, Marxism advances internationalism, the amalgamation of all nations in the higher unity" (Lenin 2004a). One thus finds that counterrevolution and nationalism are denoted as synonyms in Lenin's highly consistent writings in defense of classical Marxism—a fact seen most decisively in his struggle against the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy, notably, in his famous "Last Testament" in which he denounces Stalin's reactionary "nationalist-socialism" (Lenin 1999).

Patriotism, or, Anti-Internationalism

In the argument that the *Juche* speech is not nationalist, Myers also opposes “nationalism” to “patriotism” and suggests that the latter merely means pride in the traditions of one’s country (Myers 2006:101). Therefore, the *Juche* speech is not nationalistic, it is patriotic. That is an untenable distinction and a restatement of Kim Il Sung’s illogical Stalinist proposition that “internationalism and patriotism are inseparably linked” (Kim 1972a: 30). Here Myers’ reference to Lenin and nationalism is instructive in antithesis—for Lenin’s hostility to “patriotism” was relentless and profound throughout his career as a professional revolutionary. Contrary to the historical falsifications of Stalinism, Lenin also never advanced a “thesis on Soviet patriotism,” as is purported by the editors of volume forty-two of the *Collected Works* (Lenin 2007). Rather, one finds that the word “patriotism” is used in an overwhelmingly negative sense in Lenin’s orthodox Marxist writings, particularly during his early struggle against the Narodniks (Russian populists) and in the struggle against the Mensheviks, Social Democrats, and Socialist Revolutionaries during the First World War and Russian Revolution. The Bolshevik program, in point of fact, rejected and combated “patriotism” in the effort to foster internationalism in light of the “fundamental truth” (Lenin’s words) that, in the modern socialist movement, the international working class has no fatherland, i.e., country or nation, as had been explained by Marx and Engels in their *Communist Manifesto* in 1847. (Their original German words are “Die Arbeiter haben kein Vaterland.”) For Lenin, as with the cofounders of Marxism, “patriotism” is false and hypocritical, associated with political charlatanry and hucksterism; with economic romanticism and nationalism; with bourgeois chauvinism and petty-bourgeois (small proprietor) sentiments; with philistinism, opportunism, and class collaborationism; with subjectivism, provincialism, populist demagoguery, and localism; with the repudiation of the class struggle and socialist revolution. “Patriotism,” in a word, is anti-nationalist and runs counter to the fundamental political interests of the international working class.

The post-bellum Soviet Stalinist counterrevolution in 1924 resurrected the nationalist ideology of “patriotism” to further the nationalist economic program of *socialism in one country*. Stalin, in particular, began to use the phrase “Soviet patriotism” in the 1930s and 1940s shortly before and during the Second World War in the struggle against German fascism (Stalin 1978:394, 397; Stalin 2003). Brandenberger has identified “Soviet patriotism” and its populist references to a

fatherland/motherland as an abandonment of the “1920s orthodox [Marxist] view of a class-based internationalist loyalty” to the workers’ state (Brandenberger 1999:85). “Soviet patriotism” was a form of Russian nationalism and national chauvinism dressed up as a class-oriented patriotism in defense of the achievements of the October Revolution. The slogan, however, actually represented the outlook and sureties of the privileged Soviet Stalinist bureaucratic caste. Another variation of the term “Soviet patriotism” is “socialist patriotism,” the latter being the one Kim Il Sung preferred in the North Korean context. One must note that such word combinations make no political sense from a classical Marxist perspective.

Writing in the 1908 article “Lessons of the Commune,” Lenin dismissed patriotism as a political illusion and explained that “combining contradictory tasks—patriotism and socialism—was the fatal mistake of the French socialists. In the Manifesto of the International, issued in September 1870, Marx had warned the French proletariat against being misled by a false national idea” (Lenin 2004b). The Stalinist political outlook, including that of North Korean national-Stalinism, thus upholds a “fatal mistake” and a “false national idea.” Political reality is contrary to the separation of nationalism and patriotism. Nationalism is the source of patriotism; internationalism is the source of socialism; and never the twain shall meet. Revealingly, the words North Korean sources use for “patriotism” (*aegukjuui* or *aegukssim*) and “nationalism” (*minjokjuui*) are found in the political and lexicological context of anti-internationalist and organicist blood-kinship terms. While Myers employs the English equivalents of these words, one finds, nonetheless, that the Greek etymological roots of “patriotism,” for instance, are equally telling: *patr* (father), *patris* (fatherland), *patrios* (of one’s father), and *patriotes* (of the same father or fatherland). Even the Latin roots of the word “nationalism,” *nasci* and *natus* (to be born) and *nationem* (breed or race) pertain to a condition of birth and blood relatedness. Patriotism and nationalism thus invoke consanguine, familial, and lineal imagery, and according to the Princeton University lexical database *WordNet*, they are synonyms. The same may be said of the corresponding North Korean terms, which are connotatively close enough to be understood as semantic equivalents and which, in Stalinist political practice, reinforce the outlook of ethnocentric national solipsism (if one may adopt Bruce Cumings’ phrase) that is emblematic of the *Juche* doctrine in its past and present articulations.

Conclusion

Kim Il Sung's *Juche* speech of 28 December 1955 was a turning point in North Korean political history, a watershed *that was*, for the fundamental reason that it outlined the politically unreformed nationalist Stalinist program of *socialism in one country* in the era of the tactically motivated Soviet "de-Stalinization" campaign. Confronted with increasingly unfavorable objective conditions in the world political situation after the Korean War, the speech by the North Korean dictator was tantamount to an emergency writ of mandamus, commanding the party and government not to abandon the autarkic economic policies and political program upon which the DPRK regime was founded in 1948. When pro-reformist factions in the WPK disputed the unreformed tactical orientation of that program and opposed Kim, they were exterminated in the Great Purge. Thereafter, with the intensifying political pressures of the Sino-Soviet split, the North Korean bureaucracy was compelled to gradually develop *Juche* into a systematic ideological doctrine, and that is what it became from the mid-1960s onwards. Despite its internationalist pretensions, because the *Juche* speech was programmatically nationalist and Stalinist from the start, its political outcome has been the more open and unabashed embrace of ultranationalist and even racist rhetoric in contemporary North Korea in tandem with the ongoing, structurally predetermined restoration of capitalism in the country. Such vulgar and reactionary political attitudes can be found in present-day North Korean leader Kim Jong Il's officially designated "classic works," such as *On Preserving the Juche Character and National Character of the Revolution and Construction* and *On Having a Correct Understanding of Nationalism*. Furthermore, recent *Korean Central News Agency* articles denounce the concept of a "multiethnic, multiracial society" for rendering national destruction in South Korea (Leppänen 2006), and declare that the "*Juche*-based theory of nationalism" holds the view that "true nationalism is immediately patriotism" and that one must be a "true nationalist before being a revolutionary." These are the political inheritances of unreconstructed national-Stalinism and Kim Il Sung's programmatic reassessment of *socialism in one country* in the watershed of 1955.

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